

Glendon honored as ‘heroine of the Notre Dame commencement tragedy’

NEW YORK - Mary Ann Glendon was “the heroine of the Notre Dame commencement tragedy” in May, an official of the National Right to Life Committee said as the Harvard law professor and former U.S. ambassador to the Vatican received the organization’s Proudly Pro-Life Award Oct. 6.

Anthony J. Lauinger, vice president of the pro-life organization and the father of eight University of Notre Dame alumni, said Glendon’s “principled refusal” of the Indiana university’s 2009 Laetare Medal led the National Right to Life Educational Trust Fund to honor her at its awards dinner.

The Laetare Medal, established in 1883, is presented annually to recognize a Catholic “whose genius has ennobled the arts and sciences, illustrated the ideals of the church and enriched the heritage of humanity.”

Glendon declined the medal because U.S. President Barack Obama, who supports legal abortion, was invited to give the commencement address and receive an honorary degree from Notre Dame.

In a letter to the Notre Dame president, Holy Cross Father John I. Jenkins, Glendon called Obama “a prominent and uncompromising opponent of the church’s position on issues involving fundamental principles of justice” and said the university’s decision disregarded the U.S. bishops’ request that Catholic institutions not honor “those who act in defiance of our fundamental moral principles.”

Lauinger said Notre Dame’s decision to give Glendon the Laetare Medal “began being portrayed as part of a convoluted balancing act by the Notre Dame administration to justify their decision to honor the most aggressively pro-abortion president in our nation’s history.”

Lauinger, whose youngest child graduated from Notre Dame last May, said many

people were willing to overlook Obama's policies "in exchange for the pageantry of a presidential visit."

"It took Mary Ann Glendon, a layperson, a mother, a wife, to put the whole sad spectacle into perspective," he said. "It was her principled refusal, her conspicuous absence, her silent witness to the dehumanized, discarded, dismembered, unborn children of our throwaway society that made Mary Ann Glendon the heroine of the Notre Dame commencement tragedy."

Glendon said her three decades in the pro-life movement taught her "never to underestimate the power of the culture of death."

Citing euthanasia and experiments on human embryos that "foster the mentality that the weak can be at the service of the strong," Glendon said today's atrocities can easily become tomorrow's routine.

She said each time we make a policy on euthanasia, abortion or embryonic stem-cell research, we are shaping the country's moral economy.

Glendon said the late Father Richard John Neuhaus accurately described the National Right to Life Committee as the greatest grass-roots movement in American history. "He was right because it has marched on despite the lack of support from the wealthy and powerful," she said.

"We are winning the battle for the hearts and minds of our fellow citizens. We will not give up. We will prevail," she said, citing an Oct. 1 report of the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life that showed a decline in support for abortion.

Glendon attributed the "headway" to the pro-life movement's ability to show that its protection of the unborn is consistent with its compassion for women.

She said individual and collective choices shape society. "Either we are advancing the cause of life or we are cooperating with the culture of death," she said.

Glendon's 10-minute remarks were punctuated by applause and began and ended with standing ovations from the dinner guests, whom she referred to as "a cloud of witnesses."

National Right to Life Committee president Wanda Franz called for “pro-life education on a massive scale” that would “inform the public of the inherent dignity of the human person at all stages of the life span.”

As an example of the need, she said opponents “get away with publishing hair-raising ideas” that include calling “the child in the womb ‘a baby’ when it’s wanted and ‘a fetus’ when it isn’t.” She said such reasoning “requires a schizophrenic mindset” and relies on “verbal sleight of hand to dehumanize the child in the womb.”

Franz said this approach is “pernicious because it makes another human being’s right to exist contingent on being wanted by someone else. This is the very opposite of the principles proclaimed in the Declaration of Independence, which speaks of the ‘unalienable right to life’ with which we are ‘endowed by the Creator’ – and not by the king or the mother or anyone else.”

The National Right to Life Educational Trust Fund is the education and awareness arm of the National Right to Life Committee. Some 250 people attended the dinner at New York’s Waldorf-Astoria Hotel.

Archbishop Timothy M. Dolan of New York gave the invocation, calling Glendon “a real confessor of the faith.”